



Protecting our children on the internet is a concern that is on all our minds today with the ever evolving world of technology.

It's not just the internet anymore. Instant information and communication is at our fingertips with the use of cell phones and other handheld devices. It's

hard to believe how quickly cell phones, text messaging, instant messaging, and "tweets" have become the prevalent modes of communication. As those technologies and behaviors evolve, we must devise strategies to ensure that our children are using these technologies responsibly and safely.

Safety Tips

- If you believe your child needs a cell phone, consider limiting camera or video send/receive capabilities.
- Make internet use a family activity. Consider keeping the computer/laptop in the family room or other open area rather than in your child's bedroom.
- Let your children know that they can talk to you about anything they encounter online that makes them feel uncomfortable. Remember, how you respond will determine whether they confide in you next time.
- Monitor your children's online activity and cell phone use just as you would the programs they watch on television, the books they read, or the movies they see.
- Tell your children not to provide personal information or respond when someone offers them something for nothing, such as free software or gifts.
- Remind your children that the people they chat with are still strangers; because you can't see or hear people online, it's easy for an adult to pretend that he or she is a kid. Internet friends are still strangers!

Gerry Leone



Technology Tips for Parents

What You Need to Know

Blocking Software: Programs that filter content which allows you to restrict access to sites you don't want your kids to visit.

Cache: A location on a hard drive in which a web browser, such as internet Explorer or Mozilla Firefox, stores information from recently visited web sites.

Chat: A feature offered by many online services or web sites that allows participants to "chat" by typing messages which are displayed instantly to the person[s] they are communicating with. Many chat programs allow users to exchange photos, videos and voice chat.

E-mail: Typed messages sent through a computer to individuals or groups. Users can attach files containing graphics, sound and video.

Filtering Software: internet software that screens and classifies its content. Some filtering software allows the user to block access.

IM or Instant Message: IM is the term used when "chatting" online. Many programs have "buddy lists" where users can see if other users are online and available to chat.

Posting: Sending a message to a discussion group or other public area.

Set the Rules

- Set guidelines for your children on internet and cell phone use, and work with them to decide what is and is not appropriate.
- Establish internet privacy rules for the family. Remember that many services provide free e-mail, so your family's e-mail address may not be your child's only address.
- Tell your children never to respond to threatening or obscene messages, and never to click on links in an e-mail or download attachments from someone they don't know.
- Do not allow your child to send or post an image of themselves without your permission.

BE ALERT TO WARNING SIGNS

- Your child turns the monitor off quickly or changes the screen when you enter the room
- Your child receives mail or phone calls from people you don't know
- Your child visits web sites containing information on bombmaking, firearms, drugs, or other illegal activity

What You and Your Child Should NEVER Do

- NEVER allow your child to arrange a meeting with someone they meet online without your permission. If a meeting is arranged, have it in a public place and go with your child.
- NEVER give out information about your child such as full name, home address, school name, telephone number, age or other personal information. Also, NEVER use your child's name or e-mail address in any public directories or profiles.
- NEVER post photographs of your children on web forums that are available to the public.

What You CAN Do

- Ask your Internet Service Provider (ISP) about their privacy policy and whether they offer filtering services to families with young children. If not, check out filtering software that you can purchase for a modest cost.
- Check the internet cache and history to see what sites your child visits. If your child clears the cache often, find out why.
- If you become aware of the transmission or use of child pornography while online, immediately notify the police, contact the Middlesex District Attorney's Office, or report it to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's Cyber Tipline at www.missingkids.com/cybertip or (800) 843-5678.
- If your child receives a message that is harassing, of a sexual nature, or threatening, forward a copy to your ISP and ask for their assistance. Additionally, contact the local police or the Middlesex District Attorney's Office.

Sexting

What is “sexting” and why is it an issue?

The term “sexting” refers to the sending of a photograph or other visual image, depicting a person in the partial or total state of nudity, via text message, from one cell phone to another.

It is troubling that school-aged children are disseminating nude photos of themselves, classmates or others, via text message. By the time our office becomes aware of these issues, the protection of the child has already been compromised. It means that the photo has been disseminated and that the sender has lost any control of it. That is why education and prevention are the most important ways to address these issues.

Is the act of “sexting” a crime?

Depending on the age and appearance of the person in the photo, and the circumstances of how it was obtained and disseminated, the act of sexting could trigger the state’s child pornography laws.

It is ILLEGAL

- To electronically harass, bully or threaten anyone
- To send nude or partially nude photos of people, or to people, under the age of 18
- To use someone’s identity online or in person without permission
- To download music without permission

As of October 1, 2010, it is ILLEGAL

- For ANYONE to write, send or read a text message, email, or IM while operating a motor vehicle, even if the motor vehicle is stationary
- For drivers under the age of 18 to use ANY CELL PHONE, EVEN A HANDS FREE DEVICE, while operating a motor vehicle

Cell Phone & Internet Safety

Continue to talk with your kids and establish open lines of communication. Clearly explain to your kids the negative consequences of sending a nude photo of themselves or others. It is especially important to stress the idea that once they send any photo, they lose control of it forever, and can never take it back.

When you buy your child a cell phone, make sure they understand that you will impose rules limiting their use and that you will also periodically check the information and photos on their phone. They may resist, but you can explain that this isn’t a matter of punishment, it is a matter of caring for them and protecting them.

Take advantage of education programs offered through the schools and local law enforcement in your community. This will better allow you to talk with your children about these issues.

To request an Internet Safety Training in your community, please contact the Middlesex District Attorney’s Office
781.897.6800 or 781.897.8300



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